



Citation for published version:

Jennings, E 2009, 'Virtual CPD: Professional development at a distance', *Impact: Journal of the Career Development Group*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 7-9.

Publication date:
2009

[Link to publication](#)

Material may be reproduced in printed and electronic formats without permission, provided acknowledgement is made.

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Impact

Journal of the Career Development Group

Spring 2009

Volume 12

Number 1



In this issue

Bidding for success: gaining external funding
Sarah Wilkie

Virtual CPD: professional development at a distance
Lizz Jennings

Entering the world of special libraries
Christopher Reeve

News from Katoke
Sheila Rudd

Transferable skills and the Information Professional
Paula Harvey

www.cilip.org.uk/cdg/impact

suggesting there might be more to libraries than books and reading. That one states that the conference was held in Blackpool and talks about 'abandoning the rule of silence' should surely bring into question whether the author was paying attention to what he was writing about or if he'd even been to his local library recently.

The closest my library has come to silence recently was the two minutes held for Remembrance Day and even that was broken by a toddler tearing around in the children's area. For the average library providing computers, story times, play sessions, talks and coffee mornings, silence has long been a thing of the past. Andy Burnham will never please everyone but when he suggests that there should be more to libraries than books at least he is not dreaming of a library that has in the main already disappeared.

Indeed the PLA conference this year proved that while reading is still pivotal to our library services there is already much more going on, whether or not it has a seal

of approval from the media. Although I did sometimes feel that the speakers were preaching to the converted I can't imagine I was the only delegate who returned to my service with a renewed sense of purpose and a determination to make some changes, however small they might be. I was also made to feel that despite the diversifying of services there is still value in following my own professional development within the library sector, something that in the past year I had started to doubt.

Jenny Ridout

*Information Services Librarian
Access Trafford*

Jenny attended the PLA as this year's British Library and Society of Chief Librarians Sponsored delegate. The place also included a day at the British Library in London where Jenny had the opportunity to learn about the role of the British Library and its work with Public Libraries across the country.

Virtual CPD: professional development at a distance

Lizz Jennings

Web 2.0 has become the standard for new technologies on the Internet, and one of the areas in which technology has allowed the Internet to change the way people use it is the realm of Virtual Worlds. Virtual Worlds have been defined in a number of ways, and one that I feel works is this:

"A Virtual World is a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented by avatars, facilitated by computers." (1)

This means that users can drop in and out, and it will continue regardless. This makes for an environment which closely resembles the real world - a conference in another city will take place, whether you attend or not. The big difference is that geography is not an issue, and events can attract worldwide audiences. This has been an area originally developed for games, and many people will have heard of World of Warcraft as an online gaming Virtual World. However,

more recently Virtual Worlds have moved away from the gaming community and become more freeform.

'Second Life is one of the most well known Virtual Worlds which is not associated with gaming'

Second Life is one of the most well known Virtual Worlds which is not associated with a game. It is free to use, although you have to subscribe (or earn in-world money) in order to maintain a location of your own. You initially enter a training area in order to learn to control your avatar (your representation in the world) and then progress to the main world. At first this is very confusing, trying to work out what to do and where to go. However, I came across references to online locations in articles and on websites, and eventually ended up visiting Information Architecture Island.

There was a clear central point, a modern looking building, and I went in, pleased (for once) to be able to look inside a building, as many of the buildings I had seen before were private. I was able to click on links to their website, drink a cup of virtual coffee and sit down on the chairs upstairs. After a couple of visits, I noticed that a sign had gone up outside, advertising some free SL versions of talks being given at the IA Summit. This sounded very promising, so I stayed up late one Friday night (SL Time is based on Pacific time), and gave it a go.

The first talk was about Communities of Practice and my first challenge was how to sit down, whilst also facing the podium. After a bit of a hokey cokey dance, I managed it, and watched the talk. The "talk" was typed, while virtual boards displayed the

Powerpoint presentation. However, the speaker's avatar was on stage, and the audience was seated around the stage, just as you would expect from a conference. I found the talk interesting, and decided to return the following week for the Peter Morville talk about Information Architecture 3.0.

I was excited, as I'd read one of his books, so this was almost a celebrity talk for me. The talk lived up to my expectations, and of the three talks I attended, it was the one I enjoyed the most. This time, I also took a little more time to talk to the other attendees. This, I feel, was the biggest advantage of using a Virtual World interface, rather than merely downloading a video, or viewing the slides: Networking. I felt able to chat to others about IA as a career, about the talk, and generally. There were virtual drinks and nibbles to enjoy, which encouraged chatting to people, and because it was a remote event, they were from various different countries.

The third talk was very much more technical than the other two, and as a result I

'You are not physically present, so relaxing in your slippers while attending the presentation is not going to appear unprofessional'

found the networking side of the event more interesting. I made sure to arrive a little early to talk to people before the presentation. I also looked up the slides after the event, which helped me understand a little more about search engine optimisation.

The advantages of using virtual worlds to attend talks were great. There was no charge for these events, which seems to be

because it is a new medium and therefore encouraging use of the system is higher priority than making money. Unlike just reading presentations or articles, there was an opportunity to talk to the speaker and to other attendees, which both aided understanding, and provided a chance to network. There was no geographical limit, so attending a talk where the speaker was on the other side of the globe was as easy as popping into the kitchen for a cup of tea! The talk was typed, so if part of it was harder to understand, you could spend some time thinking about it before moving on to the next part (although you could get out of sync with the slides, as I found on the third talk). You are not physically present, so relaxing in your slippers while attending the presentation is not going to appear unprofessional, although conversely if your avatar is dressed in a revealing bikini, you might like to consider how that presents to other participants. Web links mentioned during the talk could be followed immediately, and remain in your web browser ready to read after the talk, without interrupting the flow, or rudely turning to another device as would happen in real life.

There are also disadvantages. You need to be familiar with basic operation of the virtual world controls, otherwise you could spend the whole talk trying to move to the

venue! The time difference has also meant that I have been unable to attend talks because they fell during working hours or at antisocial hours. Your Internet connection needs to be reliable, and fast, as the system is visual and uses a lot of bandwidth. You also interact using avatars, which do not have the operator's real name, so contacts made online may be harder to track down in real life.

Using Second Life as a medium for learning was a really valuable experience, as it allowed me to attend talks on professional interests which fell outside what was relevant to my employment at the time. It allowed me to talk with people already practising in the area I was interested in, and ask questions about their real experiences in Information Architecture. It was more engaging than simply reading an article, and stimulated my interest to explore further reading, as I was able to read mentioned articles and web sites immediately, and save them for future use.

Lizz Jennings

Information Librarian (E-Resources)

University of Bath

E.Jennings@bath.ac.uk

1) Bell, M. (2008, June). Definition and Taxonomy of Virtual Worlds. Paper presented at New Digital Media (Audiovisual, Games And Music): Economic, Social And Political Impacts, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

There is currently a vacancy on the Career Development Group national committee for the post of *Honorary Treasurer (National Account)*

You don't need to be an accountant or an expert in maths; if you are seeking a new challenge then this is the post for you! Initial training and follow-up help would be provided along with assistance in compiling the end of year accounts. You will be required to attend our AGM and up to three Council meetings throughout the year; all expenses are covered.

For initial queries contact former Honorary Treasurer Judith Smith: judith@barnabasfund.org

If you wish to nominate yourself for the post, please forward your details by Friday 10th April to Kerry Benstead, CDG Honorary Secretary, kerry.benstead@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk